DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 276 535 PS 016 240

AUTHOR Luster, Tom
TITLE Beyond Social Address: Linking Socioeconomic Status to Family Functioning.
PUB DATE 22 Aug 86
NOTE 22p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Psychological Association (Washington, DC, August 22-26, 1986).
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Beliefs; *Child Rearing; *Cognitive Development; *Family Environment; Individual Characteristics; Infants; *Mothers; *Parent Influence; Social Support Groups; *Socioeconomic Status; Toys
IDENTIFIERS *Home Observation for Measurement of Environment

ABSTRACT

The present study attempts to move beyond the social address research design to investigate the process by which socioeconomic status (SES) exerts its influence on parenting practices. Of particular interest were maternal practices related to cognitive outcomes in children. The conceptual model of the study was based on the reliable finding that SES is positively related to the quality of the rearing environment, as assessed with Caldwell and Bradley's Home Observation for Measurement of the Environment (HOME). To explain that finding, four hypotheses were tested among 65 mother-infant dyads: (1) child-rearing beliefs mediate the relationship between SES and the intellectual quality of the rearing environment; (2) SES is positively related to the level of social support available to the mothers which, in turn, is related to the quality of care mothers provide for their children; (3) temperamentally difficult infants elicit less supportive care in families with few resources; and (4) the positive relationship between SES and the HOME are related to family income. Support was found for the first two hypotheses. (Author/RH)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
X This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

ED276535

BEYOND SOCIAL ADDRESS:

LINKING SOCIOECONOMIC STATUS TO FAMILY FUNCTIONING

Tom Luster
Department of Family and Child Ecology
Michigan State University

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
Tom Luster
TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

PS 016240

Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Psychological Association, Washington, D. C., August, 22, 1986

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

ABSTRACT

The present study represents one attempt to move beyond the social address research design and to shed light on the question: what is the process by which socioeconomic status exerts its influence on parenting practices? Of particular interest are maternal practices related to cognitive outcomes in children.

The conceptual model was built around the reliable finding that socioeconomic status is positively related to the quality of the rearing environment, as assessed with Caldwell and Bradley's Home Observation for Measurement of the Environment (HOME). Four plausible hypotheses to explain this consistent relation were tested with a sample of 65 mother-infant dyads. 1) Childrearing beliefs mediate the relation between SES and the intellectual quality of the rearing environment. 2) SES is positively related to the level of social support available to the mothers which is, in turn, related to the quality of care mothers provide for their children. 3) Temperamentally difficult infants elicit less supportive care in families with few resources. 4) The positive relation between SES and the HOME reflects the fact that several items tapped by the HOME are related to family income. Support was found for the first two hypotheses.

BEYOND SOCIAL ADDRESS:

LINKING SOCIOECONOMIC STATUS TO FAMILY FUNCTIONING

For over a century, those interested in how environments contribute to differences among families and children have, to a large extent, relied upon a "social address" research design in their investigations (Bronfenbrenner and Crouter, 1983). Researchers employing a social address model compare developmental outcomes of children or socialization practices of parents living in contrasting environments, or put another away, living at differing social addresses. The contrasting environments that are studied are typically defined by geography (e.g., rural versus urban) or by social background (e.g., middle-class versus working-class) (Bronfenbrenner, 1986).

According to Bronfenbrenner and Crouter (1983), the earliest studies to employ a social address model focused on the capabilities of children living in differing environments. For example, an early study by G. Stanley Hall (1883) compared the level of knowledge upon entry to school of children from urban and rural areas. He also compared children from different ethnic backgrounds (Irish versus "American"). During the early 1900s the number of social addresses studied increased markedly and this research strategy yielded many interesting and useful findings. Yet, as Bronfenbrenner and Crouter point out, these studies of children using a social address model were limited in several ways. They discuss one of the major limitations in the following passage:

> ... no explicit consideration is given in research operations to intervening structures or processes through which the environment might affect the course of development. One looks only at social address -- that is, the environmental label -- with no attention to what the environment is like, what people are living there, what they are doing, or how the activities taking place could affect the children (Bronfenbrenner and Crouter, 1983; pp. 361-362).

By the 1930s, some of these limitations were dealt with when the social address model was applied to parents as well as to children. Investigators focused their attention on the childrearing practices of parents living at different social addresses. Studies of parents from different social classes (Anderson, 1936), ethnic groups (Davis and Havinghurst, 1948), as well as cross-cultural studies (Whiting and Child, 1953) proliferated during the 40s, 50s and 60s. These studies described how parents living at various social addresses interacted with their children, and attempted to link differences in childrearing practices to developmental outcomes.

The social address that has been scrutinized most closely is socioeconomic status (SES). The relation between the social position of the family and nearly every conceivable parenting practice and child outcome has been examined during the last 50 years. Most of these studies share two limitations however. First, these studies typically use a composite measure of socioeconomic status -- that is, some combination of income, education and occupation. As Otto (1975) points out, these

composite measures tend to be atheoretical and can "mask rather than expose relationships." Secondly, and more importantly, studies of socioeconomic status generally do not attempt to explain the process by which SES has such a pervasive influence on family functioning and subsequently child outcomes. Thus we know little about how experiences associated with one's position in the social hierarchy lead to various approaches to childrearing.[1]

The present study represents one attempt to move beyond the social address research design and to shed light on the question: what is the process by which SES exerts its influence on parenting practices? Of particular interest are maternal practices related to cognitive outcomes in children.

The conceptual model guiding this research is presented in Figure 1. The model was built around the reliable finding that socioeconomic status is positively related to the quality of the rearing environment, as assessed with Caldwell and Bradley's Home Observation for Measurement of the Environment (HOME). Although operational measures will be described later in the paper, it is important to point out now that the HOME inventory assesses quantitative and qualitative aspects of the rearing environment and it is a strong predictor of cognitive outcomes in children (e.g., school achievement, IQ and language ability).[2]

Figure 1

How do we explain the consistent finding that SES is positively related to the quality of the rearing environment as assessed with the HOME inventory? Four plausible hypotheses were tested in this study and the rationale for each of these hypotheses is described below.

Hypothesis 1: Beliefs regarding effective and appropriate childrearing practices mediate the relation between SES and the quality of the rearing environment.

This hypothesis builds on earlier work by Kohn (1977). Kohn demonstrated that occupational conditions and education are related to what parents value for themselves and their children. Well educated parents and parents employed in positions that allow them considerable autonomy and substantive complexity tend to value self-direction for their children. In contrast, parents with relatively little education, involved in highly routinized jobs with little substantive complexity, tend to value conformity. Given that parents occupying varying positions in the social structure differ in what they believe is best for their children, it seems

---

[1]There are notable exceptions however. For a good review of the social class and socialization literature see Gecas, 1979.

[2]Higher scores on the HOME inventory are associated with valued outcomes in children like higher IQ scores.

likely that they will also differ in their beliefs regarding how valued outcomes can be achieved.

To test the hypothesis that childrearing beliefs mediate the relation between SES and childrearing practices, beliefs regarding effective and appropriate childrearing practices were assessed in four domains: 1) beliefs regarding spoiling the child; 2) beliefs regarding floor freedom; 3) beliefs regarding discipline and control; and 4) beliefs regarding verbal stimulation. A decision to assess beliefs in these domains was based on three criteria: 1) all are areas in which parents are known to differ in their behavior -- for example, how much verbal stimulation they provide for their infants; 2) all of the behaviors that correspond to the beliefs measures have been linked to cognitive outcomes in children; and 3) there was reason to believe that these differences in parenting practices may be due, at least in part, to differences in childrearing beliefs. Anecdotal evidence found in other studies suggested that parents hold differing beliefs in these four areas.

Hypothesis 2: SES is positively related to the level of social support available to the mothers which is, in turn, related to the quality of care mothers provide for their children.

This hypothesis draws upon two lines of research. The first is social network research demonstrating that low SES mothers in various industrialized countries tend to have smaller informal networks than middle-class mothers (Cochran, 1984). The second is research demonstrating that level of social support is positively related to the quality of care mothers provide for their children (Crockenberg, 1981; Crnic et al., 1983). Taken together, these studies suggest that availability of social support mediates the relation between SES and childrearing practices.

Hypothesis 3: Perceived difficult temperament is negatively related to the quality of care provided by the mothers if the mothers have few resources (i.e., little education or low income) or little social support.

Studies examining the relation between infant temperament and quality of the rearing environment have yielded inconsistent results. Some studies have concluded that difficult infants elicit less supportive care than easier peers (e.g., Milliones, 1978), while other studies have found no relation between difficult temperament and parenting style (e.g., Daniels, Plomin and Greenhalgh, 1984). Bates (1980) has suggested that discrepant findings may be due to the fact that the effect of difficult temperament on parenting practices depends upon other family characteristics. It seems likely that a difficult infant will elicit less supportive care if the mother is trying to deal with a wide array of stressors (e.g., lack of financial resources) at the same time that she is trying to cope with the demands of a difficult child. In addition, one would expect well supported mothers to deal more effectively with an irritable infant than mothers who are relatively unsupported (Crockenberg, 1981).

Hypothesis 4: There is a direct relation between SES and items assessed with the HOME inventory. The positive relation between SES and HOME scores reflects the fact that several items tapped by the HOME (notably items assessing the availability of playthings -- subscale 4) are related to level of family income.

Several of the items in subscale 4 of the HOME, "provision of appropriate play materials", are concerned with whether or not the focal child has various toys available to him or her. Availability of these items may depend upon the financial resources of the family.[3]

In sum, it seems reasonable that SES could influence childrearing practices both directly (financial resources for toys, books, etc.) and indirectly (via childrearing beliefs and social support). In addition, the extent to which difficult children elicit less supportive care from their parents may depend on the amount of stress the parents are dealing with concurrently, and the amount of support available to the parents.

METHODS

Subjects

Sixty-five mother infant dyads, residing in Tompkins County, New York, were recruited for this study. The infants ranged in age from 9-23 months with a mean age of 15 months. Fifty-two percent of the infants were male and 43% were first born children.

The mothers ranged in age from 18-39 years, with a mean of 26 years. Most were white (95%), married (83%) and not employed outside the home at the time of the interview (60%).

The families were a heterogeneous group with regard to socioeconomic status. Mothers' education ranged from 9-20 years with a mean of 12.7 years. Forty-five percent of the mothers had 12 years of education. Seventeen percent had less than 12 years and 39% had more than 12 years. Only 12% had a four year college degree. The fathers had similar educational backgrounds, and the correlation between mothers' education and fathers' education was .46. The median family income category for the sample was $11,001-$14,000, with a range from less than $5,000 to more than $35,000.

Most of the mothers were recruited either through the WIC program (43%) or at Well Child Clinics (35%). The remaining mothers (22%) were referred by mothers who had already participated in the study.

Measures

1) Home Observation for Measurement of the Environment (HOME): The dependent variable, maternal behaviors related to cognitive outcomes in children, is operationally defined as a mother's score on Caldwell and Bradley's (1979) HOME inventory. The HOME is an observation/interview instrument developed to assess quantitative and qualitative aspects of the rearing environment. The version used in the present study is the 45 item measure developed for infants and toddlers. Each of the items is scored "yes" or "no" and all items are weighted equally. A total score for the HOME is determined by counting the number of items scored "yes".

---

[3]The developers of the HOME inventory discuss this issue in the HOME manual (Caldwell and Bradley, 1979; page 98).

Several studies have demonstrated that the HOME is a strong predictor of various measures of cognitive ability assessed during the early childhood period. Moreover, the HOME is predictive of cognitive outcomes in children when maternal IQ is controlled (Ramey et al., 1984; Gottfried and Gottfried, 1984).

2) Parental Beliefs Survey (PBS): The Parental Beliefs Survey was developed for this study to assess parental beliefs regarding effective and appropriate childrearing practices. The four subscales of the PBS assess beliefs in four domains. A) Beliefs regarding spoiling the child: Subscale A is comprised of 7 items that assess whether or not parents believe they can "spoil" their infants by being responsive to their cries and by being affectionate. Higher scores indicate that the mothers believe babies can be spoiled by responsive and/or affectionate behavior. For this subscale, the reliability coefficient, Cronbach's alpha, is .86. B) Beliefs regarding floor freedom: Subscale B, comprised of six items, assesses the parents' beliefs regarding how much leeway an infant should be given in exploring his/her home environment. Higher scores indicate the mother believes the child should be allowed considerable leeway in exploring the home environment. For this subscale, alpha equals .58. C) Beliefs regarding discipline and control: Subscale C assesses the mothers' beliefs regarding discipline and control. There are four items in this subscale. Mothers with higher scores emphasize the importance of controlling their children's behavior and view disciplining the child as a particularly important parenting task. The reliability coefficient for this subscale is .78. D) Beliefs regarding verbal stimulation: Subscale D is concerned with beliefs regarding verbal stimulation. Mothers with higher scores believe in providing infants with verbal stimulation early, often and contingently. Cronbach's alpha for this subscale is .38. In addition to the fact that there are only five items in this subscale, the low reliability coefficient is probably due to the fact that there was not a great deal of variability in the responses given to the items in this subscale. Mothers generally endorsed the idea of spending time talking to their babies even when the babies were very young.

3) Social Support Interview: Level of social support was determined by responses to the following three questions: 1) Now I have some questions for you about some of the people who are important to you. The first question concerns people you can talk to about child care. If you want advice on how to raise (child's name) is there anyone you can talk with? Who could you turn to for ideas and advice? 2) What if you need someone to take care of (child's name) if you are sick or if there is an emergency; is there anyone you could count on, on short notice? 3) We have found that parents seem to have fewer opportunities than nonparents to talk to other adults when they are raising young children. When you are concerned about a personal matter -- for example, about someone you are close to or something you are worried about -- is there someone you can talk to about these matters? Mothers were also asked how they knew the person or people they mentioned in response to each of the questions. For each question, the number of people mentioned and the number of kin and nonkin were recorded. A total support score, used in the analyses reported in this paper, was computed by adding the number of people mentioned in response to all three questions. If the same person was mentioned more than once, that person was only counted once.

4) Infant Characteristics Questionnaire (ICQ): The ICQ was developed by Bates and his colleagues (Bates, Freeland and Lounsbury, 1979) to assess parents' perceptions of their infants' temperament. Measures were developed for 6, 13 and 24 month old infants. The version for 13 month old children was used here. Nine items loading on the "fussy/difficult/demanding" factor were included on a questionnaire. Each item is scored on a seven point scale. The scores for each of the items are added together for a total temperamental difficultness score. A higher score indicates that the child is perceived as being fussy, difficult and demanding.

5) Socioeconomic Status: The background information needed for this study, including information about parents' education, occupational prestige, income, age and family composition was collected with a questionnaire. The questions are fairly standard questions modeled after those used by a national survey organization. Fathers' occupational prestige was assessed with the Hodge/Siegel/Rossi prestige scale (Siegel, 1971).

6) Home Screening Questionnaire (toy checklist): Mothers were asked to complete the toy checklist of the Home Screening Questionnaire (Coons et al., 1981). The toy checklist is comprised of 50 items (e.g., ball, shape ball or box, blocks). Mothers are asked to check those items they have in their homes and that they allow the index child to play with. This measure was included to see what role income plays in determining the variety of playthings available to the children in the families participating in this study.

Procedures

When a mother was recruited, a home interview was arranged for a time when her baby was likely to be at home and awake. About one week before the interview, participants received the questionnaire part of the study in the mail. The packet contained the following instruments: 1) Background Information, 2) Infant Characteristics Questionnaire, and 3) Parental Beliefs Survey. Subjects were asked to complete the questionnaires before the time of the home interview, so that they could be picked up by the person conducting the interview.

The home interview generally lasted about an hour and a half. The HOME inventory was scored first; observation items were scored for one hour. Next, the mother was interviewed about her social support network.

At the end of the interview, the interviewer examined the questionnaires for any items that had not been answered. Mothers were asked to complete any missed items. Finally, any questions the mother had about the study were addressed.

Analysis

Pearson product-moment correlations were used to examine the relations among the various factors in the model (Figure 1). Path analysis was used to assess the extent to which the data were consistent with the model. Standardized betas are presented on path diagrams.

Results

The correlations between the SES measures and HOME scores are all positive and significant (see Table 1). This finding is consistent with several previous studies that have demonstrated that higher SES families tend to provide their infants with more intellectually supportive environments, as assessed with the HOME, than lower SES families. Having established this relation, we can now examine the extent to which the four hypotheses formulated to explain this relation are supported by the data. The first two hypotheses will be considered together.

The first two hypotheses assert that childrearing beliefs and social support mediate the relation between SES and the quality of the rearing environment. As shown in Table 1, the zero-order correlations are consistent with these hypotheses. Low SES mothers are more likely than middle-class mothers to believe that infants can be spoiled by responsive and affectionate behavior, and to emphasize the importance of being strict disciplinarians when dealing with their children. These beliefs, in turn, are associated with lower scores on the HOME inventory. Higher SES mothers are more likely than low SES mothers to emphasize the importance of allowing their infants opportunities to explore the home environment (floor freedom) and of providing their infants with verbal stimulation early, often and contingently. Parents who subscribe to these beliefs tend to provide their infants with more intellectually supportive environments.

Table 1

Consistent with the second hypothesis, higher SES mothers generally have more extensive support networks than lower SES mothers. Of the SES variables, mothers' education is the strongest predictor of support network size. Further analyses indicate that well educated mothers are more likely than other mothers to obtain support from people who are not a part of their kinship group. There are few differences among the mothers in how much they rely upon kin for support. Mothers who have more extensive support networks have higher HOME scores ($r = .39$).

Because the various belief measures and social support are correlated with each other was well as with the outcome measure, multiple regression was used to assess the extent to which each of the childrearing beliefs subscales and the social support measure are related to the dependent variable (HOME scores) when the others are controlled. With all five variables in the model, three of the variables are significant predictors of HOME scores. They are beliefs regarding spoiling the child, beliefs regarding verbal stimulation and social support (standardized betas are-.31, .25 and .25 respectively).[4] Together, the five independent variables

---

[4] Beliefs regarding floor freedom and beliefs regarding discipline and control are not significant predictors of HOME scores when the other belief subscales and social support are controlled, presumably because both are highly correlated with the spoiling subscale ($r = -.53$ and .57 respectively).

account for 44% of the variance in HOME scores.

Path analysis was used to test the hypothesis that childrearing beliefs and social support mediate the relation between SES and childrearing practices. The results of the path analysis are presented in Figure 2.

Figure 2

The model in the upper half of the page shows that both mothers' education and family income are significant predictors of HOME scores when only the SES variables are entered into the regression equation as independent variables; fathers' occupational prestige is not predictive of the quality of the rearing environment when family income and mothers' education are controlled. Together, income and education account for 20% of the variance in HOME scores.

In the second model, beliefs regarding spoiling the child, beliefs regarding verbal stimulation and social support are included in the model as mediating variables. As shown in Figure 2, the results of this analysis are consistent with the hypotheses that childrearing beliefs and social support mediate the relation between socioeconomic status and the quality of the rearing environment. With the mediating variables in the model, the two SES measures are reduced to nonsignificance. The data support the conclusion that SES influences parents' beliefs about effective and appropriate childrearing practices and also level of social support. These, in turn, influence mother-child interaction and the way in which mothers structure the home environment.

The model including the mediating variables accounts for 45% of the variance in HOME scores, or put another way, it explains twice as much of the variance in HOME scores as the SES measures by themselves. Thus the variables that have been designated as "mediating variables" appear to explain "within-class" differences in parenting style as well as "between class" differences. This finding can be illustrated more concretely by examining the zero-order correlations between the childrearing beliefs subscales and the HOME scores for the subsample of mothers with exactly 12 years of education ($N = 29$). For this subsample, the following correlations between childrearing beliefs and HOME scores were computed: beliefs regarding spoiling the child (-.72); beliefs regarding floor freedom (.29); beliefs regarding discipline and control (-.64); and beliefs regarding verbal stimulation (.40). These results demonstrate that within this group there are clear differences of opinion regarding appropriate childrearing practices and that these differences are related to parenting style. One fact that is often overlooked in research where people are grouped by gross indicators (e.g., middle-class families, black families, single parent families) is that within each of these groups there is likely to be considerable diversity regardless of the outcome under investigation.

Next we turn our attention to the hypothesis regarding infant temperament. As shown in Table 2, perceived difficult temperament is unrelated to HOME scores ($r = .03$). This is the case even when only those

with little education, low incomes or little social support are considered. Thus, Hypothesis 3 is not supported.

Table 2

In the fourth hypothesis, the possibility is considered that differences in HOME scores actually reflect differences in the financial resources of families. The path analysis presented in Figure 2 indicates that the direct effect of income on the quality of the rearing environment is not very substantial when the mediating variables are included in the model. A more fine grained analysis shows that there is a positive (though nonsignificant) correlation between income and subscale 4 of the HOME inventory, "provision of appropriate play materials" ($r = .16$; $p = .10$). However, a significant correlation was found between family income and the number of toys checked on the toy list of the Home Screening Questionnaire ($r = .23$; $p < .05$).[5] Thus, children from financially advantaged families, on average, have more playthings than children in low income families, but this difference does not appear to account for much of the variance in HOME scores.

Discussion

The central question of this study is: what is the process by which socioeconomic status influences parenting practices related to cognitive outcomes in children? Four hypotheses were formulated as possible answers to this question and the data support the first two hypotheses. These hypotheses assert that childrearing beliefs and social support mediate the relation between SES and parenting style.

The mothers in this study clearly had differing beliefs about what parenting practices were best for their children and these differences were associated with SES, and with mothers' education in particular. The childrearing beliefs most strongly related to the quality of care they rovided for their infants were beliefs regarding spoiling the child and beliefs regarding verbal stimulation. Mothers who were concerned that being responsive to their infants cries and being too affectionate would lead to a "spoiled" child apparently acted in accordance with these beliefs and appeared to be less involved with their infants. Although nearly all mothers thought it was important to talk to their babies from the earliest days, the mothers differed in how much they emphasized the importance of providing their infants with verbal stimulation and these differences in beliefs were reflected in their parenting styles.

---

[5] Surprisingly, the correlation between mothers' education and the number of toys checked was slightly higher than the correlation between income and the number of toys available to the child (.28 versus .23).

Although there was no consensus regarding what childrearing practices are most effective and appropriate, it cannot be emphasized enough that all 65 mothers in the study loved their babies and seemed genuinely concerned about doing what was best for them. However, the mothers had differing ideas about what skills and characteristics are most important to acquire, and also had differing ideas about what they as parents could do to help their children acquire these skills and characteristics. Parents who have in common the objective of helping their children achieve a satisfying life, have differing ideas about how to achieve this objective. This is consistent with Kohn's (1977) work on parental values.

The data also support the hypothesis that level of support mediates the relation between SES and childrearing practices. Better educated mothers had more extensive networks (primarily nonkin); mothers with more extensive networks provided their infants with more intellectually supportive environments. Although I started the study believing that social support that was directly related to child care (e.g., advice, information, role models) would be the most strongly related to positive mother-infant interaction, my ideas in this regard changed during the course of the 65 interviews. Although further study is needed, it appears that the key support variable is emotional support. Overall, the mothers indicated that what was important to them was having someone who took an interest in them personally (listening to them, recognizing their contributions and valuing them). Mothers whose own needs were being met were more likely to meet the needs of their children. Although one's spouse is probably the one who can best meet (or frustrate) these needs, friends (nonkin) also contribute emotional support. Relatives tend to provide more instrumental support (money, babysitting, exchanges of goods and services).

There was little support for the other two hypotheses tested. The fact that there was not a significant relationship between difficult temperament and the quality of care the children received, even when only families with few resources were considered, is an interesting finding. It could mean several things. The first thing that comes to mind is that we are finding out that parents, like children, are more resilient and flexible than we generally give them credit for being. A second possibility is that difficult infants actually due elicit less supportive care than their easier peers but the HOME is not sensitive enough to pick this up. A third possibility is that temperamentally difficult infants elicit lower quality care only in very high risk samples. Milliones (1978), who reported a relatively high correlation between difficult temperament and positive maternal behavior (-.54), sampled low income, inner city, young mothers. In sum, while there is no doubt that infants influence the behavior of parents, we still do not understand very well how, to what extent, or under what circumstances infants influence the <u>quality of care</u> they receive.

There was also little support for the hypothesis that differences in HOME scores are largely due to differences in family income. Although there is a significant positive correlation between income and HOME scores, the path analysis suggests that the effect of income on HOME scores is largely an indirect effect, via childrearing beliefs, rather than a direct effect.

Given these findings, one final question that needs to be considered is: what are the practical implications of these results? In response to this question, I would like to focus on the area of childrearing beliefs

because some thought provoking issues can be raised. Clearly parents differ in their childrearing beliefs and these beliefs are related to what parents actually do. Are some beliefs better than others? Should we try to change parental beliefs, and if so are we imposing our values on others? My current thinking is that a parent's approach to childrearing is influenced, at least in part, by his/her values and by his/her understanding of child development. Obviously, as a general principle we have no right to impose our values on each other, but we can provide a service to parents by making current information about child development readily available to them. My impression from talking to parents is that many of them hold erroneous views, or at least views that are inconsistent with current thinking about development and influences on development. The case of spoiling beliefs is particularly striking. Many parents believe that they will create an unbearable tyrant if they are too responsive and too affectionate in their dealings with their infants. Given the fact that child development experts of the 20s and 30s contributed to these questionable views, it seems reasonable that current experts (hopefully with more accurate information) should convey to parents the latest thinking on responsive and affectionate parenting (as well as on setting limits judiciously). It seems entirely possible to provide parents with accurate information without infringing upon their rights to ultimately decide what is best for their children.

Beyond Social Address: Implications for Research

As noted at the beginning of this paper, the social address research design has yielded many useful results but also has many limitations. Social address models document group differences in families and children living in contrasting environments, as measured by gross indicators. However, these studies contribute little to our understanding of why parents and children in these various contexts differ from each other. As Bronfenbrenner and Crouter (1983) pointed out, in order to understand these differences we need to link context to process. Without an understanding of process, the practical applications of our research efforts are limited.

An understanding of process allows us to develop more effective policies and programs to assist those who care for children and ultimately the children themselves. For example, studies have shown that children raised in the inner city are more likely than children raised in rural areas to display emotional problems and conduct disorders. Although this is an interesting finding, it tells us little about what we can do to assist these children and their families. The excellent work by Michael Rutter and his colleagues (Rutter, 1981) comparing children raised in inner London with children raised in a rural area provides many clues about how the stresses associated with urban life contribute to family adversity and undesirable outcomes in children. Although, as Rutter himself points out, more work is needed to fully understand how city related stressors contribute to family adversity, his contribution to our understanding of the problem moves us closer to being able to generate effective policies and programs to deal with these problems.

When programs based on research findings are implemented to assist families, evaluations of these programs can, in turn, be used to assess the validity of our conclusions regarding causal processes. The case of social support is a good example. The results of the study discussed in this paper, as well as the results from several other studies, indicate that level of support is positively related to responsive parenting practices. Although nearly all studies of social support are correlational studies, a reasonable conclusion is that the two variables are causally related--social support contributes to positive parenting. Yet a counter argument could be made that the association between social support and the quality of the rearing environment is spurious. Mothers who are skillful in their dealings with their children may be skillful in their transactions with others generally and thus develop extensive networks. Parenting skill and availability of support may both be attributable to a third factor such as a personality characteristic (e.g., nurturance or gregariousness).

The best way to try and establish a causal link between social support and parenting practices would be to manipulate the level of support available to parents and observe the outcome in an experimental field study. This is essentially what David Olds and his colleagues (Olds et al., in press) did with their Nurse Visitation Program for first time mothers in the Appalachian region of New York State. Some of the mothers in the Olds' study received supportive home visits from public health nurses during the prenatal period and two years post-partum. A second group received visits only during the prenatal period, and a third group served as a control group. According to Olds et al.:

During their post-natal home visits, the nurses carried out 3

major activities that they had begun during pregnancy: parent education regarding influences on fetal and infant development, the involvement of family members and friends in child care and support of the mother, and the linkage of family members with other health and human services. A central aspect of the nurses approach was to emphasize the strengths of the women and their families.

Preliminary findings from this study indicate that it is a successful program, especially for those mothers considered to be high risk parents--poor, unmarried, teen mothers. High risk mothers who received regular home visits from the nurses during the two year post-natal period were less likely than their comparison group counterparts to abuse or neglect their infants. They also punished and restricted their infants less frequently and provided their children with a larger number of appropriate play materials than their counterparts in the control group. This study supports the conclusion that availability of social support is causally related to positive parenting, at least for high risk mothers.

The results of studies using process models can be used in the formulation of programs and policies, and evaluations of these programs and policies either provide support for our conclusions regarding causal processes, as in the Olds study, or they force us to rethink some of our conclusions and/or assumptions (e.g., results from Head Start evaluations changed many people's thinking about the preschool years as the critical period for cognitive development). Therefore what I propose for future research is not new. Instead, I propose that we allocate more of our time and effort to trying to understand how extrafamilial factors influence family functioning. As we acquire this information we are better equipped to influence policy makers and program planners. Subsequently, when programs are implemented and policies are changed, we should use these opportunities to validate, modify or completely rethink the conclusions drawn from our research. Ultimately our research should not be simply about families but instead should be for families.

References

Anderson, H. E. (1936). The young child in the home. New York: Appleton-Century.

Bates, J. E. (1980). The concept of difficult temperament. Merrill-Palmer Quarterly, 26, 299-319.

Bronfenbrenner, U. (1986). The ecology of the family as a context for human development: Research perspectives. Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Psychological Association, Washington, D.C.

Bronfenbrenner, U. (1958). Socialization and social class through time and space. In E. Maccoby, T. M. Newcomb & E. L. Hartley (Eds.), Readings in Social Psychology (pp. 400-425). New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston.

Bronfenbrenner, U., & Crouter, A. C. (1983). The evolution of environmental models in developmental research. In W. Kessen (Ed.), History, theory and methods (volume 1) of P.H. Mussen (Ed.), Handbook of Child Psychology (4th edition) (pp. 357-414). New York: Wiley.

Caldwell, B.M., & Bradley, R. H. (1979). Home Observation for Measurement of the Environment. Little Rock: University of Arkansas at Little Rock.

Cochran, M. (1984, November). Partners in learning: Home, school, community. Paper presented at the Minnesota Council on Family Relations, Minneapolis, MN.

Crnic, K. A., Greenberg, M. T., Ragozin, A. S., Robinson, N. M. & Basham, R. B. (1983). Effects of stress and social support on mothers and premature and full-term infants. Child Development, 54, 209-217.

Crockenberg, S. (1981). Infant irritability, mother responsiveness and social support influences on the security of infant-mother attachment. Child Development, 52, 857-865.

Daniels, D., Plomin, R. & Greenhalgh, J. (1984). Correlates of difficult temperament in infancy. Child Development, 55, 1184-1194.

Davis, A., & Havinghurst, R. J. (1948). Color differences in child rearing. American Sociological Review, 11, 698-710.

Gecas, V. (1979). The influence of social class on socialization. In W. Burr, R. Hill, F. I. Nye, and I. Reiss (Eds.), Contemporary theories about the family (pp. 365-404). New York: The Free Press.

Gottfried, A. W. & Gottfried, A. E. (1984). Home environment and cognitivie development in young children of middle-socioeconomic -status families. In A. W. Gottfried (Ed.), Home environment and early cognitive development: Longitudinal research (pp. 57-115). Orlando: Academic Press, Inc.

Hall, G. S. (1883). The contents of children's minds. Princeton Review, January-June, 249-272.

Kohn, M. L. (1977). Class and conformity: A study of values (2nd edition). Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Milliones, J. (1978). Relationship between perceived child temperament and maternal behaviors. Child Development, 49, 1255-1257.

Olds, D. L., Henderson, C. R., Chamberlin, R., & Tatelbaum, R. (in press). Preventing child abuse and neglect: A randomized trial of Nurse Home Visitation. Pediatrics.

Otto, L. (1975). Class and status in family research. Journal of Marriage and the Family, 37, 315-332.

Ramey, C. T., Yeates, K. O. & Short, E. J. (1984), The plasticity of intellectual development: Insights from preventive intervention. Child Development, 55, 1913-1925.

Rutter, M. (1981). The city and the child. American Journal of Orthopsychiatry, 51 (4), 610-625.

Sigel, P. S. (1971). Prestige in the American occupational structure. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Chicago, Chicago.

Whiting, J. W. M. & Child, I. L. (1953). Child training and personality: A cross-cultural study. New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press.

FIGURE 1

CONCEPTUAL MODEL

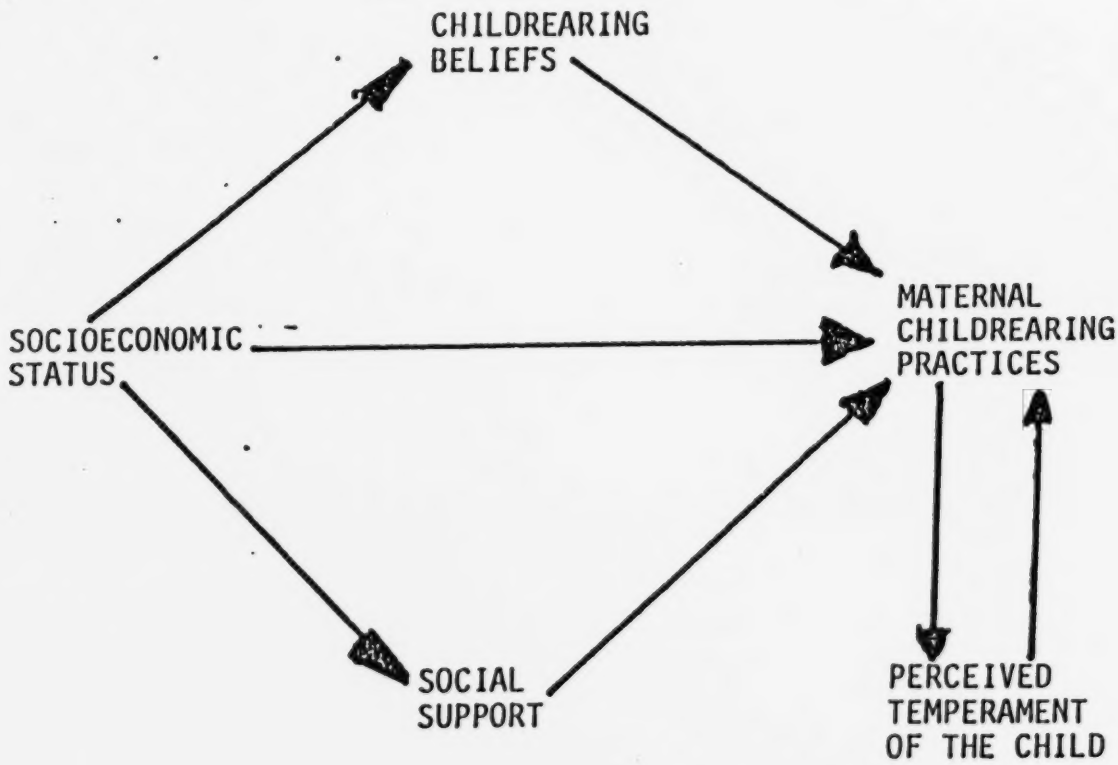


TABLE 1

ZERO-ORDER CORRELATIONS

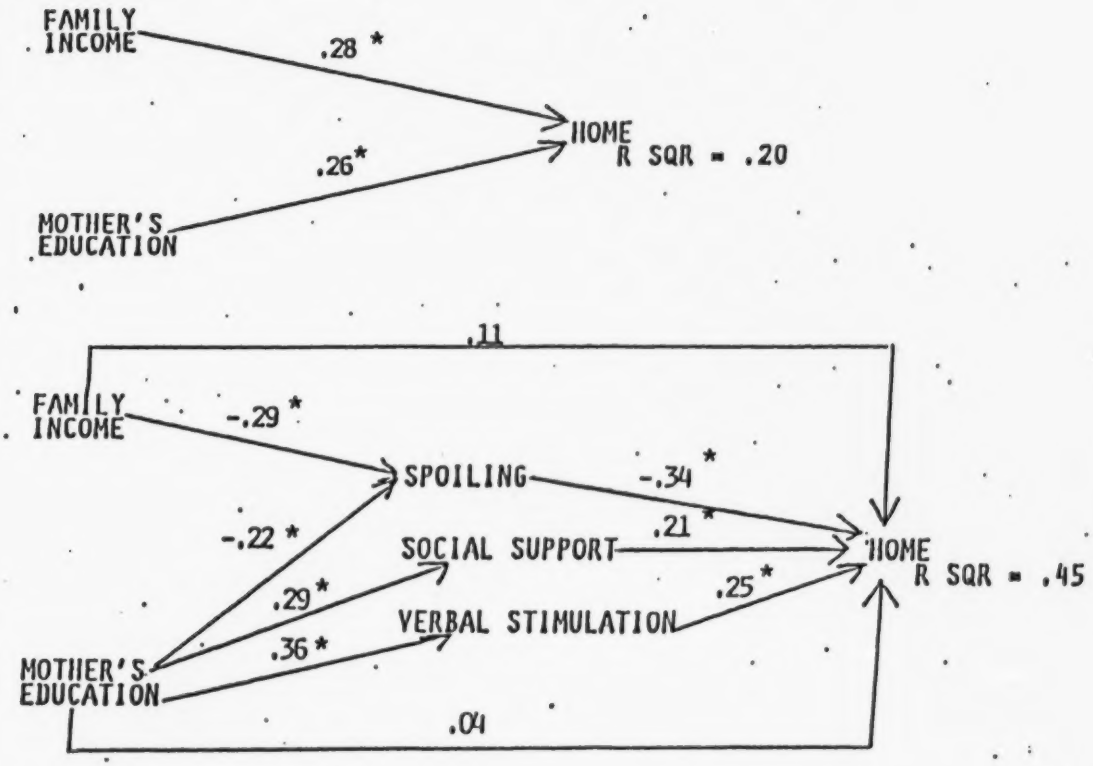
	MOTHER'S EDUCATION (N=65)	FAMILY INCOME (N=65)	OCC. PRESTIGE (FATHERS) (N=54)	HOME TOTAL (N=65)
HOME	.36*	.38*	.29*	1.0
CHILDREARING BELIEFS				
1) SPOILING	-.33*	-.37*	-.09	-.56*
2) FLOOR FREEDOM	.39*	.15	.14	.39*
3) DISCIPLINE/ CONTROL	-.20	-.07	-.04	-.31*
4) VERBAL STIMULATION	.35*	.26*	.26*	.49*
SOCIAL SUPPORT				
TOTAL SUPPORT	.41*	.29*	.24*	.39*
A) KIN SUPPORT	.09	-.04	-.07	.16
B) NONKIN SUPPORT	.39*	.34*	.28*	.32*

FIGURE 2

PATH MODEL **

(STANDARDIZED BETAS)

(N=65)



* p .05

** NONSIGNIFICANT VARIABLES DELETED

TABLE 2

CORRELATIONS: PERCEIVED TEMPERAMENT AND HOME

	PERCEIVED TEMPERAMENT**
	TOTAL SAMPLE (N=65)
HOME	-.03

	HIGH SCHOOL OR LESS (N=40)	MORE THAN HIGH SCHOOL (N=25)
HOME	-.02	.02
	INCOME < MEAN (N=35)	INCOME > MEAN (N=29)
HOME	-.15	.27
	SOCIAL SUPPORT < MEAN (N=38)	SOCIAL SUPPORT > MEAN (N=27)
HOME	-.04	.02

** Higher scores indicate that the child is perceived as being fussy and difficult.